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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: THREE NORTHERN VIEWS ON YAR'ADUA,
PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION SCENARIOS, AND 2011 ELECTIONS

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Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: Visiting State Department Nigeria Desk Officer traveled with PolOff and PolSpecialist to Kano, Zaria, and Kaduna on May 10-13 and met separately with three longtime Northern political observers. Our first meeting was with Dr. Usman Ahmed Jalingo, Secretary General of Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF is a group which promotes northern political interests) and Vice Chancellor of Taraba State University. He asserted that Northern governors opposed Yar'Adua's presidency from the start, but were unable to prevent his nomination at the 2007 People's Democratic Party (PDP) convention because their own corruption made them vulnerable to pressure from then-President Obasanjo. Jalingo claimed further that northerners were also opposed to a second term for Yar'Adua, but lamented that the opposition parties are ineffective, and "not really opposition at all." In a separate meeting, National Chairman of the opposition Peoples Salvation Party (PSP), Dr. Junaidu Muhammed, reflected a similar view, questioning the prospects for anything like a fair election in 2011, and saying that "the only (real) opposition is the army," though adding that he still thought a coup unlikely. Finally, Mukhtar Zubairu Sirajo, a former special advisor on Media to former Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Makarfi, said that many of Nigeria's leaders still act as though they were rulers in a military regime, rather than elected officials. Sirajo referred to the President as a "sick man" and claimed that if Vice President Goodluck Jonathan were to assume the presidency, that he would not turn down the opportunity and that it would be difficult for the PDP to ask him to step aside in the 2011 elections. We have heard both sides of the Yar'Adua re-nomination issue, from those that support it and those that oppose it. The key remains the President's health and what that portends as to how the 2011 election nominations play out. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Dr. Usman Ahmed Jalingo, Secretary General of ACF and

Vice Chancellor of Taraba State University, as well as former administrator of the Nigeria Labor Congress, said that former President Olusegun Obasanjo had promised to put someone from the South-South into the presidency, and since he knew he could not change the tacit North-South rotation, he picked Yar'Adua as his successor because he thought would die during the campaign. Jalingo asserted that Northern governors were aware of his intentions but they were afraid to challenge him because "all of them are corrupt" and knew that the former President would use the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission against them. Jalingo also said that the North does not support the President for a second term because "he is weak." (Comment: He did not specify whether he meant physically or politically, but we understood him to mean both. End Comment.) Jalingo said that if Yar'Adua dies and Jonathan assumed the presidency, the North would "flare up, even if it means the end of Nigeria." When asked about the recommendation that ACF would make in this scenario, he said that hypothetically ACF would support Jonathan's completion of the current term with the agreement of the PDP to produce another Northern candidate for the 2011 elections. In regards to the opposition parties, Jalingo called them "noisemakers" and "protest movements" that are "not really opposition at all." However, he stressed that Nigerians would readily oppose the PDP if they had a coherent platform.

13. (C) Dr. Junaidu Muhammed, National Chairman of the PSP, former Chair of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, and a medical doctor, questioned the ability of Yar'Adua to serve as President on health grounds, claiming that his health had already been a problem when he was Katsina governor. Turning to prospects for 2011, he said there is nothing the opposition can do to challenge the PDP except to "arm and train someone to oppose them...as the only

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(real) opposition is the army." Still, he stressed that he did not believe there was anyone among the current military leadership who was in any way inclined to organize a coup. Muhammed remained pessimistic about prospects for the 2011 elections, fearing that the ruling PDP would simply disrupt the process in any place they were unsure they could win. He was adamant that the effort to create an opposition "mega-party" (ref. A) would fail because it would require internal political coherence among the opposition which he said was unattainable, given what he saw as the continuing rivalries among key opposition figures.

14. (C) Mukhtar Zubairu Sirajo, a former special advisor on Media to former Kaduna Governor Ahmed Makarfi, declared that Nigeria's leaders "still act as if they were not elected" into office, and instead have a mentality of getting rigged into office by "hook or crook," then acting as if they owed nothing to ordinary Nigerians. He said dissatisfaction with Yar'Adua is so strong in the North that he anticipated there will be a challenge to the President from within the PDP, if he stands for re-election in 2011. He also feared that if the 2011 elections are as corrupt as the 2007 elections, this could touch off serious violence in many areas; he stressed, however, that the conflict would not be between North and South, but between the people and the government. Sirajo echoed Muhammed's assessment of the President, saying "a sick man thinks differently than a healthy man." Sirajo maintained that if Yar'Adua becomes incapacitated and cannot carry out his duties and Jonathan assumes the presidency, that Jonathan would not resign (out of pride for representing the South-South), and it would be difficult for the PDP to ask him to step aside in the 2011 elections.

15. (C) Comment: We agree with Jalingo and Muhammed that the opposition parties can do little to challenge the PDP, especially with several of the smaller political parties experiencing internal conflicts. That said, we are struck by the strength of negative feeling all three interlocutors display toward Yar'Adua and prospects for his re-election, or even his survival because of health reasons. While it is

hard to imagine a ruling party failing to re-nominate a sitting President for a second term (provided he is not ruled out by deteriorating health), we have heard similar views from quite a few other PDP contacts, especially from the North. That being said, there is also ample evidence that there is a cadre of PDP opportunists that want Yar'Adua to run again (providing he survives) so that they can use his re-election bid for their own personal political gains. End Comment.

16. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS